

# THE CATHOLIC ART QUARTERLY



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# The Catholic Art Quarterly

Official Bulletin of the Catholic Art Association

Printed four times a year, Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Michaelmas cycles,  
at Davenport, Iowa, with ecclesiastical approbation

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## President's Page

### OIL PAINTING

Many members have wondered why there are so few oil paintings in the CAA traveling exhibit, and why oil paintings get little commendation from our juries. Some think that it is a matter of prejudice and that the juries are narrow-minded, while others think that these are right and therefore that oil-painting must be wrong.

But the CAA is not prejudiced against oil painting. We know that there can be nothing wrong with the technique in itself for God made the plants from which the painting-oils are extracted. Therefore oils, varnishes, gums, plastics, lacquers and so forth are as good for painting purposes as wax, egg-white, casein, egg-yolk, or any emulsion. There can be nothing wrong with materials as such.

They say that the first attempts to mix oils with other binders for painting were made in the North of Europe, where the damp, changeable climate rendered true fresco and some forms of tempera painting somewhat impractical. There the early practitioners learned well their craft of glaze painting with oil. It was a slow,

careful process. Great care was taken in the selection and preparation of materials. Their rigid standards of accomplishment, the exacting apprenticeship, the vital traditions are amply proved by the fact that we possess to this day panels of the 15th century little changed from their original freshness and brilliance. If the CAA could exhibit modern oil paintings as sincere in religion and as perfect in craftsmanship as the work of the Flemish primitives, it would be indeed delighted to do so.

Unfortunately the use of oil became popular all over Europe at a time that coincided with the decadence of painting. This decadence has now fallen into a ruin which leaves us without a sound tradition of oil painting.

Let us explain. The Flemish painters of the 15th century—the masters of the mixed-oil technique—, were devout persons painting sacred images with all reverence and honesty. The importance of their subject-matter required work of a permanent nature. They painted therefore on carefully prepared panels of hard, seasoned wood. They ground their own pigments according to long proven meth-



ods, and they followed a logical sequence of operations in laying thin elastic coats of paint one over another. All in all it was an arduous process requiring skill, patience and much thought. They were not looking for effects but rather for substance. Nothing was left to chance mood or manipulative accident. They painted the essential nature of things as apprehended by the inner vision of the mind. They used their eyes only to help understand the *nature* of the things they painted. They were happy painters as is evident in the serene beauty of their patient work.

Their followers—in line with the religious aberration of the 16th century — abandoned religious subject matter and the seriousness that goes with sacred art. Instead of sacred art they began to portray pagan myths in which they did not believe; even such myths as Leda and the Swan, and the amours of Jupiter, which were hardly consonant with Christian values. But it was fashionable. Wealthy patrons were anxious to possess fashionable things and to exhibit their own magnificence. Portraiture was used to inflate the individual ego. The demand for paintings was great. There was no point in going back to small wooden panels when canvas could cover larger areas quickly. There was no point either in slaving painstakingly to build up successive coats of color-glazes when almost the same effects could be had in one coat. The older, slow, schematic procedure gave way to the *alla prima* technique. To supply the demand indeed a few painting factories came into being. The earlier, complete craftsmanship withered so that in our own day it has all but disappeared.

The habit of painting subjects con-

cerning which they had no convictions distorted the painters' artistic conscience. They no longer painted for didactic ends. Rather they accustomed themselves to vanities and came to think of the visual appearance of objects as the real end of painting. This was despoiling the inner vision for the eye; the mind for the sense. Those who disapproved of pagan mythology were left with nothing to paint but lovely interior scenes, still life, charming landscapes, genre or whatever else the eye might meet in nature that can be painted on canvas.

On account of the regrettable aesthetic tradition associated with oil painting, contemporary artists are not apt to think of its potentialities for good sacred work. If they paint with oils, they find it hard to free themselves of the modern ready made paint, so conveniently supplied in tubes; of the haphazard ways of applying it; the feverish haste; and especially of the modern ingrained habit of impressionistic or unrational vision which stresses the accidentals of personal expression. They can find few masters to teach them right reason in regard to their art.

There is one difficulty, inherent in the technique itself. Because oil dries slowly, it is possible to work in the wet paint, scrape out and cover over without the necessity of irrevocable decision. Michael Angelo rejected oil as fit only for women because of the opportunity it gives for hesitating, unthought-out and feeble work. If the painter has to grind his own colors, make and lay the grounds for his panels, strain and purify his oils, he has far greater respect for his medium. He dares leave nothing to chance. He must have a complete thought-out plan before even the first stroke is



applied. For he knows that once a decision is painted it is quite difficult to revoke it. This does not mean that those techniques are necessarily best which are most difficult to do, nor that oil painting is wrong.

It means only that when any technique becomes too easy many abuses creep in, which is less apt to happen with the more exacting techniques. As examples, water-color painting and wood-engraving are exacting techniques. They are particularly good for the beginner because mistakes in proper handling are at once obvious. Any false step in using water colors or engraving wood is easily apparent—even to the beginner.

The very ease of handling is one of the treacheries of oil painting. It leads only too readily into questionable paths, especially for the beginner or advanced amateur. This facility is doubtless the reason why oil painting grew in overwhelming popularity and supplanted the older techniques, in a period that was more interested in ease and effect than in self-discipline and permanence.

What our age needs is less of ease and more of discipline even in matters of technique. As Chesterton said, we cannot "sit upon soft sofas and become a sturdy race." Technical laxity goes with spiritual laxity. No one would give himself the trouble to paint secular frivolities if he had to use the techniques described by Theophilus Presbyter, de Mayerne or even Cennino Cennini.

The CAA has consistently preached a return to origins. This is not a romantic, aesthetic or antiquarian prejudice. It is a serious effort to clear our minds in order to find our way back to sacred life. In calligra-

phy, in architecture, in music, dress, etc., we have continually sought an understanding of the basic simplicities. Our attitude towards oil painting is part of the same effort to see our problem sharply and to clear away the mists of contemporary custom that dim our vision.

In being secularized the arts of the world have been seduced from their traditional dignity. Catholic art has accepted almost the whole of this secularization. What are we to do about it? We must meet the enemy on all levels and from all angles. Even technical matters must not go unexamined. We will find our way out of the swamp not by the glimmer of the Will o' the Wisp but only in the full light of the Sun.



## INCONSISTENCY

"I would be a saint," I say to Him  
In Gothic chapels  
Where the lights glow dim:

But when I meet Him on the open  
road,  
Burdens and chattels,  
Levite-like I pass the load.

—Sister Helene



# Rings

By Graham Carey

The peoples of the sacred cultures of the past have always tried to integrate their lives by informing those lives at every possible point with their religion. They did so not only in elaborate rites and ceremonies but also in less conspicuous ways by the marking of the instruments of ordinary daily use with whatever religious symbols seemed most appropriate. A cooking pot or a serving ladle might be marked with the sign of the sun, as a reminder that food, like all gifts, is from above. A hunting spear might bear the image of the god of death, or of death as a part of God's plan to remind the hunter that his activity is not mere sport in our modern sense, but an aspect of man's God-given stewardship over the animal world, a serious business to be undertaken seriously. The things made by primitive peoples are rich in such symbols, though their essentially religious character often is overlooked. Too often, because in our day religious symbols have degenerated into "ornaments" and "superstition," we interpret the still living symbols of less corrupted peoples as we properly interpret our own dead ones. In a religious culture everything made or used or done is considered as potentially holy. It should therefore be properly stamped with a mark indicating that particular holiness. All things, both natural and artificial — mountains, rivers, trees, cows, houses, boats, tables, cooking pots and stirring spoons — should be thought of as the potential instruments of grace that they are. They should be blessed and dedicated

for their immediate ends and uses and as possible means of helping man to his final end in God.

And what is true of all things natural and artificial is even more true of the human body and its parts, of the Temple of the Divine Spirit. If pots and pans should be sealed with the seal of their dedication, how much more so the temple itself, with its pillars and dome, its doors and its windows? And so indeed it has always been. In lands all over the world, and at all times, traditional people have marked out for especial respect and honor those parts of the body which seem richest in analogies of the Divine graces. And, however unfamiliar the idea may be to our secularized minds, we can, by examining these traditional adornments, see what the intentions of the adorners must have been.

Here we will discuss three parts of the body only—the nose, the ear and the finger, and the decorations by means of which men have tried to increase and emphasize the religious significance of these parts.

## II

Our mortal life depends upon our breathing, and thus our breath has always been a symbol of our mortal life, and of our spirit or immortal life. The word *spirit* comes from *spirare* to breathe. The Greeks used their word *aveuma* in the same sense, and the analogy appears in many other languages. Sacred Scripture is full of it. "Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones: Behold, I will cause



breath to enter into you, and you shall live." (Ez. 37.5). And again "God, in whose hand thy breath is." (Daniel 5, 23).

The nostrils are the avenue of the breath. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." (Gen. 2, 7.) And again "All in whose nostrils was the breath of life." (Gen. 7, 22). Through their portals the inspiration of God passes into man. So if man is to seal his nostrils with a sanctifying mark, the nose must be the object of adornment. The septum of the nose may be easily pierced, and a ring or other ornament hung thereon. However often we may forget it, such was undoubtedly the origin and original significance of the nose ring. The ring in the nose of the bull is a matter



of physical convenience, but that in the nose of a man or woman is a religious affirmation of dependence upon God "in whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind." (Job 12, 10).

It is perhaps a measure of our insularity of mind that when people whose customs are different from our own place ornaments on the nose we are apt to find them absurd or ridic-

ulous. In obedience to a mental parochialism of which we are innocently unconscious, too often our reaction is "Lo, the poor Indian, whose untutored mind—"; or even "How different from the life of our dear Queen." Nevertheless the nose ring is a holy seal upon the gateway of the spirit. Let those snigger who will.

The nose ring may seem to us particularly grotesque, because to many today the nose itself is a somewhat ludicrous organ, and this attitude again is a measure of our secularism. In a frivolous society; pleasure is what really counts, and we are interested in things in proportion to their power to thrill us. Unlike the eyes and the mouth, which are what psychologists call "sexual symbols," and which certainly express and cause emotional states, the nose is unglamorous. We may see a propriety in it, but are seldom really thrilled by it. The judgments, therefore, of those whose motives are intellectual rather than emotional, and the customs based on them, seem strange.

### III

The conscience is thought of as a voice, still and small—as something heard. "Hear the word of the Lord, O ye women, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth." (Jer. 9, 20.) Our ears also must be sanctified, and they must be guarded as well. Through the ear, portal also in the temple of the Holy Ghost, come words, good words and bad. We put a guard, or door man, or porter at that gate to keep out the words with which we have no business, and let in those with which we have. So, in the past, it has been customary to sanctify the ear also with a decorative mark, a little golden ring. It is not



only a making holy in the sense of sanctifying but also a sacrifice (*sacri* for sacer, *ficare* for facere: to make holy), for a wound is voluntarily received that the ear may be dedicated to the uses of virtue. "The ear of the wise seeketh knowledge." (Prov. 18, 15.) The wound and the promise are accepted together in patience and humility that the spiritual life may be advanced. "As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear." (Prov. 25, 12.) The bird shown perched upon the shoulder of St. Gregory is an example of the same symbolism.



We do not today think of earrings as barbaric or grotesque, but we are as far from an understanding of their original significance, as in the case of nose rings. To the secular mind earrings are obviously pretty, and exist for no other purpose than to be pretty. And having no meaning, the wound has no meaning, and with the help of a little mechanical ingenuity it can easily be avoided. It is not necessary to wound the flesh for this small vanity. The wholly secular earring is no longer even a ring, but a little bangle that screws on.

#### IV

It is a basic Christian principle that

love of neighbor depends on love of God. The opposite doctrine, as expressed in Leigh Hunts's Abu Ben Adam, is heretical. Like other heresies it does not work. If I love my neighbor for any other reason than that God loves him, and wishes me to follow His example, then I can hate him for the same reason in reverse. To love our neighbor in the full Christian sense, we must love God more, being willing to "hate father and mother," that is to give up those comfortable feelings of loving and being loved, if obedience to God's principles demands it. The true love of God brings with it, and because of it, the true and unselfish love of His creatures. This is a hard doctrine to live up to and no Christian unaided is able to act on it for very long stretches at a time, but it is what the Catholic Church believes and teaches on the subject.

The most important creatures that we are bound to love are our fellow human beings, "our neighbor"; and our most important neighbor is our spouse. Therefore true and unselfish love of the spouse depends on love of God, rather than on those comfortable feelings of loving and being loved, on which the secular world sets such store. A marriage founded upon selfish love, motivated by desire for the enjoyment of these feelings is bound to be at least a partial failure. True Christian marriage is rooted in the love of Christ.

To love Christ it is necessary to assume burdens. To enter into Christian marriage it is necessary to make promises, give bonds. The word *bond* has a physical as well as a metaphysical meaning. On the physical side it means a chain, or rope or wire



with which a person or thing is literally "tied up." And it means an immaterial promise which, if kept, no less surely restrains the person who has bound himself by its limitations. A man is bound over to keep the peace, we say. His word is as good as his bond. The bond, in both meanings, is a limitation of freedom, a restraint to liberty of action. To the disciplined person the mental bond is as effective as a material chain or cord, and far more convenient.

Here we have the essence of the wedding ring. The Franciscan friar can wear a rope about his waist as a symbol of his bondage and vows, but a ring is a more convenient badge. A metal chain would be an irksome appendage, but one link of a metal chain, just the size to fit the finger, is consistent with a life of active work. The ring is a convenient reminder of the promise. As the groom puts the ring on the bride's finger he says: "With this ring I thee wed, and plight unto thee my Troth," that is, I pledge or promise my truth or fidelity. The two bonds, mental and material, go together. Each spouse accepts a symbol of limitations voluntarily imposed. To proclaim to the world their seriousness of intention, they tie themselves up as they tie themselves down.

Weddings rings have been worn on a variety of different fingers, but the fourth on the left hand has been the most usual. Macrobius (*Saturnalia*, Lib. VII, cap. 13) says that this finger was chosen because it was the safest. The left hand is safer than the right, for the same reason that our watches are worn on the left wrist. On this finger the precious seal stone would be least apt to be injured. But this author also says that he had it from an

Egyptian priest that the real reason for this choice was that the annular finger was connected by a large vein or nerve directly with the heart. "Because of this nerve," he writes, "the newly betrothed places the ring on the finger of his spouse, as though it were a representative of the heart." Later, in the 7th century, St. Isidore of Seville (*The Ecclesiastico Officiis*, lib. xx, cap. 8.) repeats the belief, which seems to have been widely held. It was also customary for the officiating priest to touch with the ring successively, the index, middle and annular fingers, repeating "In Nomine Patris, et Filii et Spiritui Sancti," and putting the ring on the last finger touched. But however it grew up the chief reason seems to have been that the annular finger symbolized the heart, and heart symbolized the affections. That which is bound and tied is the affection of the spouse.

From the earliest times people have been interested in the use and symbolism of knots. It is a vast symbolism, connected closely with those of weaving cloth and baskets, of sewing, braiding, embroidery, netting and knitting. It is far too large a subject to be more than touched on here. The chief ideas connected with it are those of multiplicity in unity, of mystery, and of God's relation to His universe. (See "The Iconography of Durer's Knots," A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Art Quarterly*, Spring, 1944.)

The earliest methods of record are believed to have been systems of knots in string, such as the Quippus by means of which the Inca sent orders to outlying provinces of the ancient Peruvian empire. The earliest rosaries were strings where the place of the modern beads were taken by knots.



Knots in string were primitive charms by which it was hoped that diseases might be cured, or enemies injured. We still speak of weaving a spell, or casting or binding a spell. "It held me spellbound." True love knots are in this ancient tradition, and primitive rings were undoubtedly often thought of primarily as knots, being actually made of knotted cords or twisted and knotted wire. The string that the modern wife ties on her husband's finger to remind him to buy the flea-soap for the dog would be called by an anthropologist a "mnemonic ring."



The knots of symbolism may be divided into the bad knots that must be untied, and the good knots that must be tied and kept tied. Concerning the first, Aristotle, speaking of the difficulties that the student of metaphysics must face, says that: "it is a good plan to go into them thoroughly; for the subsequent certainty is a release from the previous perplexities, and release is impossible when we do not know the knot." (*Metaphysica*, Book III, 1, 2.) Bad knots are assimilated to the maze or Cretan labyrinth, the complicated path through life, full of pitfalls and blind alleys, which we can only thread if we have in our hand the saving clew. Didron (quoted by W. R. Lethaby, *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, London, 1892, Ch. VII), speaking of the labyrinths inlaid on the floors of medieval French cathedrals, says that "the whole device was deemed to be indicative of the complicated folds of sin by which man is surrounded, and how impos-

sible it would be to extricate himself from them except through the assisting hand of Providence."

"O what a tangled web we weave  
When first we practice to deceive."

"Ornaments in the form of a knot, which are widely distributed in nomad art, comprise an especially suggestive symbolism, based on the fact that the different parts of the knot are opposed to one another, at the same time that they are united by the continuity of the string. The knot resolves for whoever understands the principle of knotting of which the invention is, so to say, itself a symbol of the hidden principles of things." (Titus Burckhardt, *In Schweizer Volkskunst; Art Populaire Suisse*, Basle, 1941. p. 85, quoted by A. K. Coomaraswamy. op. cit.) Fallen man is the victim of disintegration, and is full of contradictions and involvements. We are all tied up in knots, and our task is to get ourselves straightened out. The knots must be untied and released. The complexes must be resolved, the tangled skein wound off upon an orderly ball. We must find the connecting thread, and follow it to its conclusion. The plot of our life is full of knotty questions, but in some way we must arrive at the denouement. If we cannot untie it we must cut the Gordian knot.

The good knots are the cohesive power and mystery of the universe itself, and of man's microcosmic assimilations to it, and the great knot tier is the sun. By his hourly and daily motions the sun traces, below each least grass blade or twig, an endless line of shadow upon the earth, for those to read who have eyes to see and memories to remember. He who would record and study such a trace



would come to understand thereby more of the sacred science of astronomy than do many of the technologists who calculate in our observatories. In many cultures the sun is likened to the spider, sitting by her door at the center of her universe, who out of a single unbroken clew weaves her mysterious web, full of turns, windings and entanglements. If one could find the outer end of this clew, as with any other maze, and follow it, he would infallibly be led back in due course to the center—would come at last into the spider's "parlor." But the good knots are only to be untied in the sense of being understood. Dante, at the very end of the *Comedia* (Par. xxxiii, 91) exclaims: "I believe that I saw the universal pattern of this knot." And Vaughn, centuries later, asks:

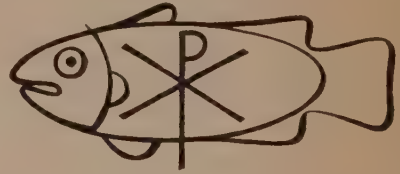
"And such a knot what arm dare loose,

What life, what death, can sever,  
Which us in Him, and Him in us,  
United keeps for ever?"

Christ and His Church are the heavenly spouses. Human nuptials are but an analogy of the divine nuptials. The true love knot is but a type of the bond by which, as Dante says (Par. 1, 117) God "draws the earth and unites it to Himself."

It is believed by archeologists that the earliest Western rings were seal rings. Signets were important objects in Babylonia, Egypt and Palestine. Cylinder seals were first worn on a cord around the neck, or attached to the arm, and were eventually so reduced in size as to be wearable on the finger. The ring given by Pharaoh to Joseph (Gen. XLI, 42) was without doubt a signet, and thus a mark of authority. The story of Esther shows the importance of the possession of

the king's ring in the case of the Persian monarch Ahasuerus. (Esther VIII). Who held the king's ring wielded the king's power of life and death over his subjects. And so also in marriage the giving of the ring confined the giving of authority over goods and affairs. "With all my worldly goods I thee endow," says the groom at the Protestant ring ceremony. The seal upon the ring gave this authority. St. Clement of Alexandria (*Paedagogus*, Lib. III, Cap. XI) teaches Christian women to avoid superfluous adornments, but allows the wearing of a gold ring, not as a frivolity, but as a seal for the goods entrusted to her. "Men," he says, "might lawfully wear a ring on the little finger, but it should bear some religious emblem—a dove, or a fish or an



anchor." Among the Romans the ring was sometimes equipped with a key, with an intent similar to that of the seal.

A Christian seal would naturally be engraved with Christian emblems. The ideas of Christian seal and Christian marriage are thus united in the seal ring. The stone is a seal because it is engraved with emblems that identify it with its owner. As the owner is a Christian, the stone becomes identified with Christ and therefore a proper marriage ring. The emblems chosen have been of great variety. A common type in Byzantium showed two busts or heads between which was a cross or chrismon. Similar to



these were two figures with Christ standing between. There were sacred monograms. There were whole words, such as *vomovoia* or spiritual union. On the shank there were whole phrases engraved, such as: "My peace I give to you."

The Bishop's ring combines the two ideas of the seal and of conjugal fidelity. As the seal the ring stands for discretion. St. Isidore of Seville (P. L. LXXXIII, 783) declaring that it is conferred as "an emblem of the pontifical dignity or of the sealing of secrets." As a wedding ring it stood for the betrothal of the Bishop to his Church. The formula found in the Gregorian Sacramentary for the giving of the ring is as follows: "Receive the ring, that is to say the seal of faith, whereby thou, being thyself adorned with spotless faith, mayest keep unsullied the troth which thou hast pledged to the Spouse of God, His Holy Church." Philo, writing much earlier, speaks of the signet ring as standing for "steadfastness and fidelity." (FUG. 150). Elsewhere (Mat. 135) he elaborates this idea, writing of "the ring, the pledge of faith, the seal of the universe, the archetypal idea by which all things without form or quality before were stamped and shaped." And again (Spec. IV, 137) he says, commenting on Deuteronomy VI, 6, 8, "The law tells us that we must set the rules of justice in the heart and fasten them for a sign upon the hand." St. Ambrose (PL. XVII, 701, 735) speaks as though it were customary in his day for virgins consecrated to God to wear a ring in memory of this betrothal to their heavenly Spouse.

According to Greek mythology the ring was the invention of Zeus. For

the crime of teaching mortal men the use of fire he had condemned Prometheus to be chained to a rock in the Caucasus for 30,000 years. Later Zeus decided that this punishment was over severe, but he kept the letter of his sentence by forcing the released prisoner to wear on his finger one link of his iron chain, to which link a fragment of the rock was firmly attached. Literally he was still bound to the rock by his iron chain. The story is related by Pliny.

"Bound to the Rock." In Christian ears these words have a different connotation. The Old Testament is full of the analogy of God as the Rock. We read of the Rock as a source of Life-giving water, of shelter, of shadow from the fierce sun, of honey, or as a retreat for birds, and as the foundation for a fortress. "I will publish the name of the Lord . . . He is the Rock, His work is perfect." (Deut. XXXII, 3 and 4.) And St. Paul tells the Corinthians who this Rock really is: "Our fathers . . . drank of that spiritual rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." (I Corinth. X, 1-4.)

Of all the many kinds of rock that have been used to symbolize Christ the diamond is the most perfect, and that for several distinct reasons. The diamond is the hardest of all stones, precious or common, so that to cut a diamond, diamond dust must be used, which gives rise to the proverb "diamond cut diamond." In the scale of hardness used by mineralogists, diamond stands as No. 10, or at the very top of the scale. Its Greek, name *adamas*, unconquerable, refers to this unique quality. From this name the Romans made *adamant*, and we still use the phrase "as hard as adamant."

But the ingenious Christian philologists of the Middle Ages, wishing to return the word to the service of Christ, presumed that *adamas* was derived from *ad amans*—that which in *loving* draws things to itself. "And if I be lifted up I will draw all things to me." The original mineralogical meaning thus became somewhat obscure, and the word was taken to refer to the lodestone or magnet's iron, the material of early compasses, and thus to the lodestar or pole star, and thus back again to the changeless Divinity that should guide our lives.

The diamond is also one of the few precious stones that is a pure element, the crystallization of carbon, one of the very most important elements to all life. As the names indicate carbon is a component both of the carbohydrates and the hydrocarbons, represented for us respectively by bread and butter.

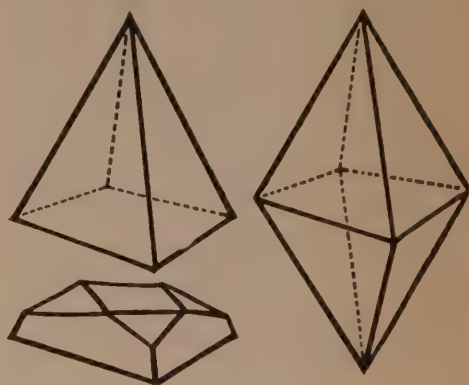
Until recently the diamond has been the rarest and more precious of all the gems. This value, as a result of its rarity, is perhaps the first quality that jumps to the mind when the word diamond is mentioned. It was so in the first days of printing in England Wynkyn de Worde (*Pilg. Perf.* 183) referring to "the diamonds moost precyous to mankynde, thy swete sone Jesus."

White is the color which is at once no color and yet contains within itself the potentiality of all colors. (See *C.A.Q.*, Vol. 8, No. 1, *Even Purple Cows*.) The diamond is white, or perfectly transparent and colorless, "crystal clear." This also makes it a symbol of Christ, the undifferentiated essence, the exemplar of purity.

Of all the precious stones the diamond has the greatest brilliance, or

*fire* as the jewellers call it. This quality is caused by the fact that its angle of refraction of light is greater than in any other transparent mineral, so that light passing through it flashes forth in a peculiarly glorious and splendid way. All other gems are dull in comparison. The diamond is a symbol of intellectual brilliance.

Finally, the natural diamond crystal is a twinned pyramid, the shape of two true pyramids attached to one another base to base. Seen in section, or in side elevation, this shape gives



the losenge, the "diamond" of the playing card, and the diamond window. The first diamonds worn in rings were natural pyramids, and with these it was as easy to write on window panes as it was difficult not to get scratched. The grinding off of the apex of the pyramid, was the first step in facetting precious stones by the lapidary's art. Next the four corners of the truncating plane were ground off, and the way was open to the modern rose cut diamond.

It has been, I think, pretty definitely demonstrated (Eckstein, A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Speculum*, Vol. XIV, No. 1 Jan. 1939) that the "lapis angularis", the stone rejected by the builders, which has heretofore been



translated "corner stone" or "Quoin", should be understood either as the keystone of a vault, or the top stone in a double peaked stone roof or pyramid. The top stone of the Egyptian pyramid, was of block granite, "polished like a mirror", and represented symbolically the sun at its zenith, from which all things come and to which they are referred. This matter of the symbolic relationship between the diamond, the pyramid, the sun and Christ can only be mentioned here. It has been treated fully by Dr. Coomaraswamy in Eckstein, (op. cit.) and in *The Symbolism of the Dome* (Ind. Hist. Gaz. XIV, 1938). There seems to be a definite reference to these ancient traditions on our dollar bill, where a truncated pyramid is shown, with an Eye taking the place of the pyramidion. This would seem to be a symbolic denial of the divinity of Christ, introduced as the devise of the reverse of the Great Seal of the United States, by some 18th century Deistic or Masonic propagandist, as who should say: "God the Son is not the head of the corner. There's no God but the Father."

So much for the stone. What of the metal of the marriage ring? Iron has been used, bronze and silver also, but gold seems always to have been employed when available. And the reasons for the choice of gold for the hoop are singularly parallel for the reasons for the choice of diamond for the setting.



Gold is a pure element. It is one of the few that are found in a native state, and in early times all gold must have come, in nuggets and in dust, from the beds of streams. For this reason it is quite likely that it was the first metal to have been used by man. Copper may have been as early, for it also is found "native," but gold is probably man's first metal.

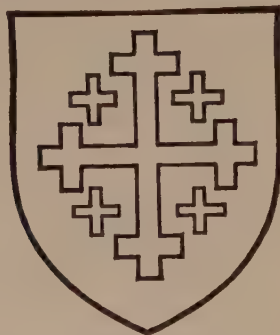
Gold has always been considered the most rare and precious of the metals, and its name has therefore become a synonym for value or wealth. Even today, our currency in this country seems to be based on it.

Gold is incorruptible. It does not tarnish or rust. Golden ornaments dug up after thousands of years in the earth are as bright as on the day they were buried. For this reason the Church insists on its use for the inner surfaces of chalice and paten. It is always bright and clean. Only a combination of acids, called *aqua regia*, the royal water, is able to dissolve it. Under any natural conditions it is eternal.

In ancient times the astronomers arranged the planets in their apparent order—the three inner, the three outer, and the sun in the middle. The seven branched candlestick is supposed to be a symbol of these heavenly bodies. To each of them a metal was assigned—silver for the Moon, mercury for Mercury, copper for the Cyprian Venus, iron for Mars, tin for Jupiter, lead for Saturn, and gold for the Sun. The sun is naturally enough associated with gold, and therefore Christ, the Sun of Justice, with gold also. Yellow is the color of gold and of the sun, and yellow and white (called in heraldry gold and silver) are always especially divine colors. In Western



Heraldry, where there is a rule that metal must never be placed next to metal, this rule is broken on two occasions only, in the arms of the Kingdom of Jerusalem and in the arms of the Vicar of Christ. Here, to empha-



size the exceptional nobility of these two coats, the golden bearings are placed directly upon a field of silver. Christ's Vicar, and the earthly kingdom where Christ lived, are shown this signal honor.

Gold also is the finest of materials in that it can be cast in moulds of extraordinary delicacy. A jeweler once told me that he had made a mould of a beetle in especially fine plaster, by a process not to be de-

scribed here, and that the gold cast was so perfect that under a lense the facets of the eyes could be distinctly seen. Molten gold, unlike all the other metals, will permeate into the minutest spaces, and take their shape.

Gold can also be beaten out into leaf of unbelievable fineness. That is, it is almost infinitely extendable in a plane. It can be beaten out so thin that a watery greenish light will actually pass through the foil. This almost infinite power of extension seems as good a symbol as any solid body can provide for God's Truly infinite immanence.

What better materials than these two, diamond and gold, could be found for a wedding ring. The ring is at once a bond, a pledge, a token of ownership, a mystery and a link. Intimately associated with these ideas



are the symbols of Christ, which give the bond, pledge and mystery their meaning—the rock, the keystone, the sun of justice, the pure, the precious, the brilliant and splendid, the magnet drawing souls, the uncorruptible and the infinitely extended. Our practice in using these two elements for this holy purpose is indeed good. All that is needed is that we should be a little more conscious of the goodness of our practice, and the reasons behind it, so that we may still further enrich it.



## V.

It is insular and parochial to see anything grotesque in the wearing of nose rings by the people of India, North Africa or the South Pacific Islands, but it would obviously be ridiculous for people of our culture to imitate this practice. Our duty is not to copy the customs of foreign people who are in their own good tradition, but to return as much as we can of the meanings which have been lost to our own cultural traditions. The wearing of nose rings might indeed have been a part of our Western culture, but as a fact it has not been so, and we do well to express our religious ideas by means of our own conventional patterns. But with earrings we can improve our practice somewhat if we want to, by piercing the ear in the old fashioned way, and by wearing either plain gold rings, or rings whose ornaments are meaningful, such as birds, pearls, little tinkling bells, or Chrisma. The world is rich with possible subjects for the ornamentation of earrings that are beautiful as well as symbolic.



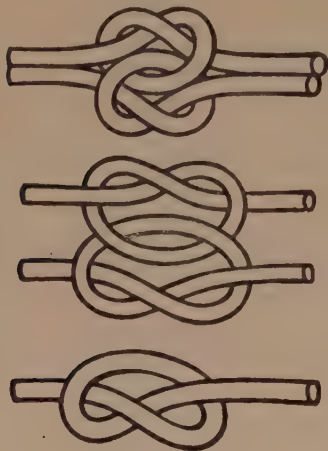
It is the same with marriage rings. Our practice need not be much modified to bring it into line with traditional standards. In former times the *annulus pronubus*, or betrothal ring, was used also at the marriage itself, so that the wedding ring, was usually set with a stone or given some other specifically Christian mark. But it is

our custom to have two rings, keeping the second one plain, and from this custom there seems no need to diverge. But in following the practice of setting the engagement ring with a diamond it might be well to emphasize the meaning of that diamond in some way, for its symbolism has been largely forgotten. Four colored stones around it, of smaller size, would stand for the evangelists or the four stages in the path of spiritual development with which their names are traditionally associated, and thus point to the Christian significances of the central stone. Twelve small stones around the diamond would serve the same symbol's purpose. There are many ways in which the engagement ring could be thus intellectually enriched.

Then again, for engagement rings some might like to revive the idea of rings as knots. Gimmel rings, or double rings each part of which is complete and moveable though they are indissolubly linked together, have a fine symbolism. They are beautiful and simple, and so easy to make that almost anyone who is handy could turn one out without difficulty with a few simple tools and a little instruction. They have the further advantage of being inexpensive (no costly stone and setting), and an old ring, or other gold object of sentimental value, may be drawn down into wire without much trouble, and furnish the material for the new symbol. For a man that wants to make a beautiful and symbolic ring for his betrothed with his own hands, who is not a jeweler and perhaps is a poor man, the gimmel ring is the answer to his problem.

No knot is more obvious, dull or prosaic than the overhand, the pattern of the lowly pretzel. And yet if

two overhand knots are linked to-



gether, a new thing appears, neat and beautiful. Most of the varieties of the true-lover knots, and there are several, are pairs of overhands laid together in various ways. They are all alike in that in each a combination of two quite commonplace forms, when drawn together, make a single harmonious unity. The two rings can move independently, and yet are united by the knot which they form in combination.

In early times the only ornament of a ring was sometimes a pair of



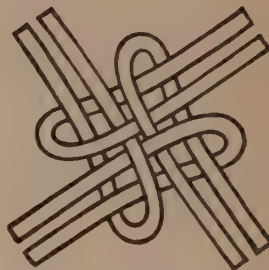
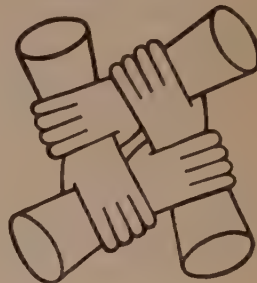
hands clasped together. This same idea may be expressed, with the motive simplified into the square or reef and grasps the other in a firm clasp. knot, each loop of which reaches out



And there is a little knot which in a similar way typifies four hands



clasped together in the pattern known as the "hand-chair." This is an even more intense expression of solidarity of purpose, and is a beautiful ornament for a ring.



Perhaps the most graceful of all these simple knots is the Carrick bend, which can be used to unite two wire rings in either of two ways, so that they are either united but moveable, or firmly and immovably attached, depending on which symbolism is favored.

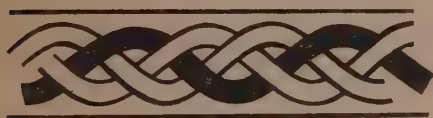
If a man can learn to tie these knots in string, he can tie them in soft wire, and with a little practice can learn to braise the ends together with gold solder. (For example of other true-lover's knots see *The Ashley Book of Knots*, p. 388.)

The modern wedding ring is a plain gold band, round or flat in section,



with its outer surface sometimes carved to represent "orange blossoms." On the inner surface is usually engraved the date of the wedding, with the initials of the wedded. Where a cross, or chrismon, or other emblem of Christ is engraved between the initials on the inner side, the ring would certainly gain in Christian significance. And on flat sectioned rings, it would not perhaps be too great a violation of established custom to engrave on the outside, instead of the rather meaningless and not very beautiful "orange blossoms," a word or two, at the choice of the bride, that would mark the wedding ring as a Christian one.

The wirtter has recently seen a pair of modern wedding rings of very beautiful symbolism devised by the spouses themselves. Each ring consisted of a flat silver band ornamented with a braid of three silver wires—a



unity consisting of three elements firmly woven together, husband, wife, and Christ. Perhaps if one of the wires were of gold, and the other two were of silver, the symbolism would be even more complete. In this case, the braid would have to be interrupted at one point by a gold diamond or other emblem of Christ. Otherwise, in a continuous tripartite braid, the gold

wire becomes a silver one somewhere, and the symbolism would be less perfect. Such a ring would be easy to make.

### " . . . MORE JOY IN HEAVEN"

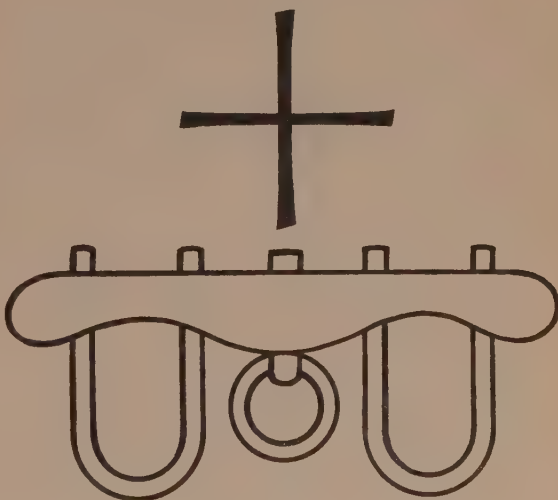
O canticles and carollings,  
Ecstatic, full-heart revellings,  
And raptures,

O fluttering of six-winged thing  
And glow of love which seraphs bring  
That captures

Vibrating light which ceaseless swings  
While tonal splendor ponderous rings,  
"Forgiven!"

When guardian hosts a soul are  
bringing  
Fast to the pardon cross-sign clinging  
New shriven!

—Sister Helene



# Easter Illustration Project

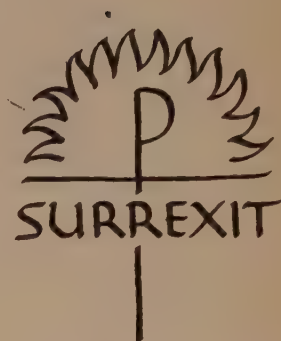
We are opening a cooperative illustration project in order to illustrate fittingly the Easter, 1947, issue of the quarterly and especially to further a study of the Easter mystery by our members.

The subjects concerning our Lord's burial, the empty tomb and the apparitions of the risen Lord are listed below. To avoid several members' working on the same subject, we are asking those wishing to join to write to the editor of the quarterly at once, stating their choice of subject. Please indicate also a second or third choice. Persons writing too late will accept the decision of the editor for their subject matter.

Sizes may be 5x7 inches for outside margins. The arrangements may be either vertical or horizontal. That is, the long or short way. All drawings should be done in *black* india ink, keeping in mind that the reduction will be almost one-half.

They should be executed in black and white (no wash, color or half-tone) with choice of brush, pen or wood-engraving and must be sent in to the editor to reach him by January 15, 1946, in order to allow for the jury to select those drawings to be reproduced in the quarterly.

As each quotation listed is very short, it would be well for the members to read the whole Gospel chapter in order to get a more complete picture of the story.—*Exhibit Chairman.*



## EASTER SUBJECTS

1. Joseph of Arimathaea asks Pilate for the body of Jesus: Matt. xxvii, 57-58; Mark xv, 42-45; Luke xxiii, 50-52; John, xix, 38.
2. Joseph of Arimathaea takes down the body of Jesus: Matt. xxvii, 59; Mark xv, 46; Luke xxiii, 53; John xix, 38.
3. Joseph of Arimathaea wraps the body of Jesus in a new, clean winding sheet: Matt. xxvii, 59; Mark xv, 46; Luke xxiii, 53; John xix, 39-40.
4. Joseph of Arimathaea buries the body of Jesus in a new grave: Mtat. xxvii, 60; Mark xv, 46; Luke xxiii, 53-56; John xix, 41-42.
5. Joseph of Arimathaea rolls a great stone against the door of the new tomb: Matt. xvii, 60-61; Mark xv, 46-47.
6. The priests and Pharisees ask Pilate for guards at the tomb: Matt. xvii, 62-65.
7. The priests and Pharisees seal the tomb and set the guards: Matt. xxvii, 66.



8. The women buy and prepare spices for the burial: Mark xvi, 1; Luke xxii, 56.
9. The women go to the tomb the first day of the week: Matt. xxviii, 1; Mark xvi, 2-4; Luke xxiv, 1-2; John, xx, 1.
10. The earthquake. An angel removes the stone and sits on it. The tomb is empty: Matt. xxviii, 2-4.
11. The women go into the tomb and find it empty. An angel speaks to them: Matt xxviii, 5-7; Mark xvi, 5-8; Luke xxiv, 3. Two angels: Luke xxiv, 4-7; cf. Luke xxiv, 22-23.
12. Mary Magdalene runs to tell Peter: John xx, 2.
13. The women leave the tomb: Matt. xxviii, 8; Mark xvi, 8.
14. Peter and John run to the tomb: Luke xxiv, 12; John xx, 3-4.
15. John looks into the tomb: John xx, 5.
16. Peter enters the tomb: Luke xxiv, 12; John xx, 6-7.
17. John enters the tomb: John xx, 8-9.
18. Two angels speak to Mary Magdalene: John xx, 11-13.
19. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene: John xx, 14-17; Mark xvi, 19.
20. Mary Magdalene brings news to the disciples of how she has seen the Lord: John xx, 18; Mark xvi, 10-11.
21. The (other) women meet Jesus. Matt. xxviii, 9-10.
22. The guards are bribed by the priests: Matt. xxviii, 11-15.
23. Jesus appears to St. Peter. Luke xxiv, 35; I Cor. xv, 5.
24. Jesus draws near to two disciples on their way to Emmaus: Luke xiv, 13-27; Mark xvi, 12-13.
25. The two disciples urge Jesus to stay with them: Luke xxiv, 28-30.
26. The two disciples recognize Jesus when he breaks bread: Luke xiv, 30-32.
27. The two disciples go back to Jerusalem to tell the story of their encounter: Luke xxiv, 32-35.
28. That evening Jesus appears to the eleven: Luke xxiv, 36-40; John xx, 19-23, 26.
29. Jesus asks for something to eat: Luke xxiv, 41-42.
30. Jesus appears again to the apostles eight days later: John xx, 26.
31. Jesus appears the third time to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias: John xxi, 1-7.
32. Peter jumps into the sea to meet Jesus: John xxi, 7-8.
33. The disciples go to the shore and find a fire; Peter hauls in the fish: John xxi, 9-12.
34. Jesus gives the disciples bread and fish: John xxi, 12-14.
35. Jesus makes St. Peter the head of the Church: John xxi, 15-20.
36. Jesus appears on a mountain in Galilee: Matt. xxviii, 16-20.
37. Jesus appears to more than five hundred persons: I Cor. xv, 6.

38. Jesus appears to James: John xxi, 27-29; I Cor. xv, 7.
39. Jesus appears to the disciples at table: Mark xiv, 14-18; Acts i, 4.
40. Jesus ascends into heaven: Mark xvi, 19-20; Luke xxiv, 50-53; Acts i, 5-9.
41. Two angels speak to the disciples at the Ascension: Acts i, 10-12.
42. Jesus appears to Saul: I Cor. xv, 8; Acts ix, 1-9, cf. xxii, 5-10.

The apparent contradictions of the Gospel narratives can be easily resolved if we follow the tradition that there were at least four women: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Mary Salome and Joanna, and that being frightened some of them did not dare to go in right at first. Presumably, Mary Magdalene went in first (possibly with another woman and saw *one* angel as in Matthew and

Mark) and ran back to tell St. Peter while the others stayed there. Some time later the others went in and saw *two* angels as told in St. Luke. After our Lord had appeared to Mary Magdalene (St. Mark says he appeared to her *first*), He also showed himself to the other women who were on their way back. Some such explanation is reasonable, and not contrary to the Gospel.



*sicut Agnus coram  
tondente se, sine  
voce, non aperuit  
os suum,*

## Book Reviews

MEDITATIONS WITH A PENCIL, by Diana Orpen, Sheed and Ward, 1946.

When drawing sacred subjects in contemporary dress, Diana Orpen is following a Catholic tradition which unfortunately is not followed often enough in our superstitious times. It is true that contemporary-dress drawings lose in universality what they gain in local color and, for this reason, are often inadvisable for permanent decoration of churches and books. But that need not deter artists from making them for purposes of teaching,

meditation, journalism, etc., especially if no undue emphasis is given to what is provincial, the universal qualities rather being shown even in local things.

Because a newspaper lives but a day its message must be as striking as possible in the language of its own day. No one would print a newspaper in Latin, even though all are agreed that it is best to read St. Thomas Aquinas in the original. The wisdom of our holy mother the Church is apparent in that she preserves the unchangeable sacred languages for the



permanent parts of the Mass while she preaches her sermons in the vernacular.

As English war-time drawings, avowedly roughly pencilled for private meditation, Diana Orpen's sketches would probably have told a better story in a newspaper than in a book. It is easy to excuse the faults of a daily sketch. But by its nature a book demands more perfect work than she was able to do under war conditions. Philip Hagreen makes even journalistic cartoons as carefully as if they were meant for a book. It is a pity therefore to see hastily thought-out sketches which are not suited to black and white reproduction printed in permanent book form.

On p. 101 is a picture of Christ crucified. The inscription is drawn *under* His feet in direct contradiction to St. Matt. xxvii, 37; St. Mark xv, 26 and St. Luke xxiii, 38, where it is said to be *above* Him. There is no excuse, artistic or other, to depart from Holy Scripture in this detail. On p. 95 we find a "double header," two ideas confused into one picture: the Good Shepherd and the Crucifixion. Actually our Lord may never have taken care of sheep. He says: "I am the Good Shepherd" because He does for us what a good shepherd does for his sheep. It is a symbol. The Good Shepherd should be drawn giving His life for His sheep in the way in which a shepherd does, i.e., getting scratched, conquering the wolf, and bringing home the lost lamb. Christ crucified is indeed our Good Shepherd; the wolf He conquers is sin and death. But it is not advisable to mix metaphors either in speech or in sacred images. In the future we hope that

Diana Orpen will avoid mistakes like those.

The best parts of Diana Orpen's work are her drawings of simple, humble people. On pp. 7, 15, 21 and 27 we find St. Elizabeth, St. Simeon, St. Joseph and Zebedee all drawn as real people. They teach us to recognize God's chosen people among the meek and lowly of the world. St. Peter on p. 41 is good also, but one wonders if he would not be even better had the artist been imbued with the tradition about St. Peter's appearance, instead of having to draw entirely upon her individual imagination. There are traditions telling how to draw the Apostles which it would be well to find out and follow. The poor old woman on p. 111, the kind father feeding his baby on p. 119 and especially a wakened father between his sleeping boys on p. 61 are also true to form and lovingly drawn. This makes us regret that most of the other personages are so close to the stilted poses of the art school models. We hope, however, that Diana Orpen will continue in the promise she gives in the well drawn simple people.—Ade Bethune.

\* \* \*

THE GEOMETRY OF ART AND  
LIFE, by Matila Ghyka, Sheed  
and Ward, 1946.

Mathematics, crystallography, biology, architecture, painting, history and esotericism are brought together in this little book of 174 pages, more than half of which are filled with diagrams and illustrations. Although a difficult book to review both briefly and justly, this is one that should be commented on in the C.A.Q. The author and the C.A.A. agree that our

contemporary life is disintegrated, and that the scattered fragments should be reunited, but they do not agree as to the principle of unification. The book puts its trust in mathematical, and the Association in religious, truth. The one accepts the secular society that we know, while the other looks towards the City of God. That seems to be the chief distinction, and it is a very important one.

This book is the most recent of a series which have appeared in this century, seeking in general to relate nature and art on a basis of geometry, and in particular to provide methods by which the beauty of designs may be increased by the conscious application to them of mathematics. The reader is offered a wealth of material of great interest—mathematical formulae and diagrams, drawings and photographs, physico-chemical, biological, archaeological and historic facts. If the author had made certain clear distinctions, and had followed them out to their conclusions, this material would have been organized in a more unified way, and would have been of far greater value. He would not have fallen into mathematicism, which is the application of quantitative principles to situations to which they have no reference.

The difference between art and nature should have been clearly emphasized. Nature produces natural things and art produces artificial things, and both kinds may be beautiful and show an interior order which may be interpretable in terms of mathematics. It seems probable that in a natural object this mathematically interpretable order is the result of the mathematical structure of the atoms and molecules of which the object is built. To this re-

viewer it seems probable also that with artificial objects the corresponding order is the result of the mathematical structure of the atoms and molecules of which the artist's brain is built. If an artificial object is a reasonably true reflection of the image which the artist sees in his mind, the brain, by means of which the mind works, will leave its impress upon the thing it has imagined as surely as any other instrument, properly used, will leave its impress. As Plato says (*Timaeus* 56), "No single particle . . . is seen by us, on account of . . . smallness: but when many of them are collected together the aggregate is seen."

The author makes some very interesting observations in this regard (p. 89), showing that the number 5 and its associated geometric forms, the pentagon and the dodecahedron, never appear in inorganic creatures, though they are very common among plants and animals; while 3, 4 and 6 are far commoner in the inorganic than in the organic world. In the same way, the logarithmic spiral, so important among plants and animals (in leaf arrangement, sea shells, horns of sheep), does not appear in the arrangement of purely mineral bodies.

Another distinction that would have added greatly to the clarification of the subject is that which should be made between art and science. Science is the business of knowing truths, and it necessarily works by analysis, breaking wholes down into parts, and "learning more and more about less and less." Science distinguishes, divides, dissects, disintegrates, disentangles. It learns to understand the whole by first understanding the parts that make up the whole. It abstracts the principles or forms of things from



their particular material manifestations. Art, on the other hand, is the business of making things. It works by synthesis. It envisages wholes rather than parts. It puts form into matter, shaping the appropriate material to the likeness of a pattern seen in the mind. Instead of disintegrating and pulling down particular things, it integrates and builds them up. Its aim is not knowledge but production. Art and science do and must work together, but neither is served if we confuse them with each other. Concepts may be taught, and therefore sciences—like geometry—may be taught in schools and by books. But an art can be learned only—by practice. You can learn to work only by working. You cannot learn to ride a horse, or milk a cow, or write a legible and beautiful hand except by doing it. Books and teachers can help only with occasional hints. It is for this reason that art schools and their students fail, while shops and apprentices succeed.

A third, and for our present purpose the most important, distinction would be between the traditional and the secular conceptions of art. The traditional view of art is that it is a serious religious activity, a whole side of life governed by the primary necessities of serving God and helping neighbor. The secular view is that art is an amelioration of the asperities of life, even an escape, when necessary, from its realities. This distinction can be made clear if we take up, one by one, the types of case in which traditional artists do use mathematics in their work, and then compare these types with the use which secular artists make of the same mathematics. There seem to be four kinds of situation in which practitioners of sacred arts use mathematics.

The first is the situation where the *form* of thing to be made is itself mathematical. It is obvious that if I want to build a huge pyramid, make a model of the globe, lay out a geometrical pavement, or make anything that is essentially geometric in its nature, I will use all the knowledge of geometry available to me, and the tools of geometry. It is the only common sense thing to do. On pp. 74-80, the table and diagrams shown are justified for this reason. So also, probably, is much that is written concerning the proportions of the Great Pyramid. In this respect such things are like the diagrams in a book of Euclid, which also must be made. Such objects are not essentially products of the imagination, but statements of knowledge, established by reason. The use of geometry in making such things is fully justified and fully conscious. The forms to be imposed are purely geometric, so it is reasonable that the means of imposition should be geometric also.

The second is the case where the *instruments* of the geometer are used. If I lay out a surface, making use of the compass, the straight-edge and the square, the mere handling of these tools will tend to suggest such shapes as the circle, the square, the root two rectangle and the hexagon. A good deal of the simple geometry that is found in works of art seems best explained in this way. It is easier to lay out a formal ellipse with two nails and a string than to work out by eye alone some other kind of oval. It is easier to plan a building with ninety-degree corners and vertical walls than to plan a building with no right angles. The use of the traditional tools of building of itself tends to impose certain formal qualities on a building,

just as the use of a reed or brush tends to impose certain qualities on the writing made with it. We cannot, of course, always be sure in any given case that geometric arrangements in a work of art are of purely instrumental origin, but we can be sure that there is in general a great deal of instrumental mathematics in things made by art.

Thirdly there is engineering. The engineer is a mathematical artist, but the purpose of his calculations is to secure the maximum of stability, strength and economy in the use of materials. This is of course a use of mathematics in art which has been tremendously developed in the modern world, but it is a use of the intention of which is structural rather than aesthetic.

And lastly there is the most important type of situation where mathematics is used in art, and this is the case where there is a clear cut religious or symbolic purpose. On p. 112 occurs the following illuminating sentence: "This idea (that of Cosmos or Order) was developed as the correspondence between the Macrocosmos (the World) and the Microcosmos, or Man, with sometimes the Temple as link, as 'proportional mean' between the two." The Temple as proportional mean between Man and the Universe, or between Man and the Creator of the Universe. This is an excellent clue to the understanding of symbolism in general. The ancient temple, and later the Christian church, was to be made both in reference to the heavens above and to man beneath. If in the sky and in the human body common mathematical principles are found, these will naturally be expressed in the proportions of

the sacred edifice. Thus we find astronomical as well as anatomical references in the laying out of the building. If we had no other evidence for believing this than that so richly offered in this book, it would be quite sufficient.



But if the men of old time seem to have had no aesthetic preoccupations, we certainly have them today. In our contemporary secular "art world," where entertainment of one kind or another is the confessed end of art, where the relationship between art and religion has been forgotten, the distinction between art and science obscured, and where the artist does not learn but is taught, too often he turns out to be a man of weak imagination, and is only too eager to clutch at the straw of "mathematicism" that is offered him. He knows that he is a weak designer. Here is a method that promises, in ten easy lessons, to make him a strong one. All the wisdom of the ancients will be in his hand.

But is there the slightest evidence that the promise is ever fulfilled? Have scientifically controlled experiments ever been made? Our author states (p. 156) that it is generally admitted that "Seurat's now famous canvasses . . . owe their quasi-hypnotic charm and power to a rigorous geometric technique of composition." But it is an unsupported opinion. Most critics do



not agree. If we turn to p. 110 we can see with our own eyes how pathetically bad a drawing can be, which is given as an example from the hand of one that knows, of the beautiful results of geometric analysis. It is called: "Harmonic Analysis of a Horse in Profile." It is a drawing that would disgrace an average high school student, who "had never drawn a line." There are without doubt unguessed subtleties of proportion in the body of a beautiful horse, but the method here exhibited has not revealed them. Gazing sadly at such a drawing we feel justified in doubting how much of Seurat's quasi-hypnotic charm is due to the conscious use of the Golden Section, and how much to the fact that he was a trained painter.

But we may grant that hypothetically a painting may receive a certain unity from being laid out on a geometrical grid, and still maintain, as we do, that such practices are a poor substitute for a healthy image-seeing faculty. As Duerer said, an artist is a man filled inwardly with images. If he is not that, no amount of outward straight lines and angles will make him one. And in the same way we must still maintain that there is no reason to believe that because we need such things that the ancient designers needed or used them. The ancient Egyptian priest would be as puzzled by the language of a modern mathematical aesthete as the latter would be

if told that "the blessed feed on a ray of light from the eye of Horus." Our secularism leads us to misjudge the motives of sacred cultures. We interpret the past which is strange to us in terms of the present which is familiar. But we are in error.

The disagreement that any traditionalist would have with this book should be just there—and only there. There is no doubt that there is a science of mathematics, and that a mathematically interpretable order is observable not only in the inorganic and organic worlds of nature but also in the world of artifice. There is no doubt that mathematical principles have been consciously used in the construction of artificial things, and that some, at least, of their "formal" element may be so explained. But the secular mind credits this conscious use with a secular motive—aesthetic enjoyment—and goes on to promise that what aesthetic effects have been achieved in the past, the same can be achieved in the future. The religious mind credits the conscious use of geometry with a sacred motive, symbolism. It is not surprising that secular minds should thus interpret history in terms of the references they know and believe in; but it is deplorable that people who believe in religion should be led into the same error. The purpose of this review is to help them avoid it. — *Graham Carey.*



# C. A. A. Notes

## EXHIBIT NEWS

At the national convention in April, we suggested that the custom be renewed, at the next convention, of having the members bring some of their work to the exhibit. This should encourage each and every one to do his best from one year to the next and learn from one another's work. For is it not the purpose of the C.A.A. for us to help each other? This exhibit will also give the jury the opportunity of selecting new pieces for possible inclusion in the C. A. A. Traveling Exhibit.

At this time we are reminding the members to begin planning what work or photographs they will send in, as the next convention may take place in five to six months from now. Work may be in any of the following techniques: calligraphy, drawing, painting, printing, wood engraving, carving (in stone, wood, ivory, etc.), metal work, stained glass, etc. We have very few specimens of ceramics and needlework, so would urge timid members to overcome their fears and send in their samples of work in these categories, also in fact in any worthwhile technique not mentioned above.

In the Christmas issue we hope to announce the date and address to which the things should be sent by those who do not intend bringing them personally to the convention.

—*Exhibit Chairman*

\* \* \*

## CONTRIBUTORS

Anton Wendling of Aachen, Germany, is sending to the United States

a few art products in exchange for food packages which one C.A.A. member is sending to him and to an invalid friend of Wendling's. The woodcut which is our frontispiece this issue is one of those art products. Before the war, Wendling was connected with a group of Catholic artists at Aachen such as Hans Schwippert, Maria Eulenbrueck, Wilhelm Rupprecht, and Anton Schickel the goldsmith, who unfortunately was a casualty on the Eastern front. Their Catholic group was disbanded by the late totalitarian regime in Germany.

"Although the completion of the dark days is not yet," Wendling writes, "I am returning to resume my place as Catholic art professor at Aachen. For I feel it my duty to go back to my origins to help rebuild the Faith there rather than to seek refuge in the Americas."

Wendling was among the very best designers and makers of stained glass windows in Europe before the war. Unfortunately many of his best works, in and around Aachen, were destroyed by bombings.

We hope to have more of his work later.

\* \* \*

Ade de Bethune is responsible both for the considerable labor apparent in the Easter project scheme of Scriptural places and for the review of Diana Orpen's book of sketches.

\* \* \*

Graham Carey, our good provider,



provided abundant copy and an encouraging letter.

\* \* \*

Two years ago, Sister Helene, O.P., who contributed two poems, was the subject of a biographical sketch by Sister Esther, S.P., in the quarterly. She was one of the officers from the very foundation of the Catholic Art Association.

\* \* \*

Many letters have come in praising Mr. Walter Shewring's "Art in Christian Philosophy," which appeared in the Pentecost, 1945, issue of the quarterly. We are pleased to announce that it has been republished in an attractive pamphlet form by Thomas Barry of the Sower Press, St. Paul's priory, Keyport, New Jersey. It is priced at seventy-five cents.

\* \* \*

### CHRISTMAS CARDS

Because a number of people have written to inquire about the Christmas cards in the last Christmas issue of CAQ we are printing a list of those from whom such cards may be bought:

Carl and Mary Paulson  
St. Benedict's Farm  
Upton, Mass.

Carlos and Mary K. Cotton  
Collegeville, Minn.

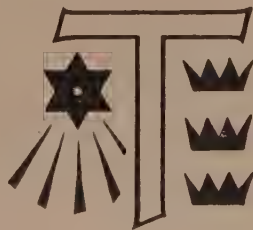
Dorothy Gauchat  
Our Lady of the Wayside  
Conrad Road, Avon, Ohio

Pio Decimo Press  
Box 53  
Baden Station, St. Louis 15  
Missouri

St. Leo Shop  
Upton, Mass.

Studio Angelico  
Siena Heights College  
Adrian, Michigan

It is best to write to these addresses directly, asking them for their prices and samples. Note that samples of six new Philip Hagreen designs may be had from the St. Leo Shop, Upton, Mass. Please do not write to the quarterly for information about these cards.



## Questions and Answers

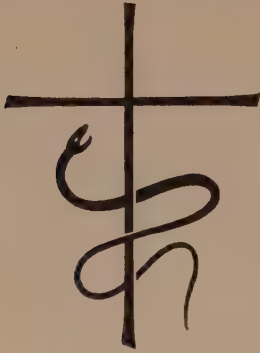
1.

Q. "In making paintings of the crucifixion, what color should be used for the cross?"

A. Unless for some very special reason the painting is to be unashamedly naturalistic, the colors of the

chief elements of the composition will be symbolic. There are several colors which are appropriate in different ways, and several that are not appropriate. If the idea is that of hope (crux spes unica), the cross might well be blue. If the idea of sacrifice is

foremost, it might be red. Black emphasizes the idea of death and of sorrow. Green would recall our Lord's words to the women of Jerusalem as He was carrying the cross: "for if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke 23, 31). Brown would be an unsuitable color, as it would tend to a naturalistic interpretation. White and yellow (silver and gold) would also be unsuitable, as they are sun colors, standing for light and Divinity. These would be appropriate for the figure of Our resplendent Saviour, but not for the instrument of His passion.



2.

Q. "In the Easter 1946 issue of the C.A.Q., after two and a half pages of why *not* to sign work, the article on page 5 carries the names: E. M. Catich and A. G. Carey. Doesn't look like complete "humility"—or do you believe with Emerson that foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds?"

"Isn't it rather a broad statement to say it's a sacrilege to sign your name to a work of art? It is what my family calls "being more right than the Pope." If you and Philip Hagreen consider it a sacrilege, I suppose it is for the two of you. But there has to be the intention before the sin is committed. Did Eric Gill commit a sacri-

lege with each work he signed? And what of the church keeping account of who wrote what Epistles and Gospels—and to whom?

There is a point to be made re signatures—but I wish it had been argued more objectively. Most artists sign their works in the same spirit in which they sign friendly and business letters. Don't you hate anonymous letters?

A. Father Catich's stricture was primarily on the signing of images destined for liturgical use. He said that he deemed it sacrilegious to write one's name on a holy image or icon. A signature on such a sacred image would be as repulsive as signatures to the various prayers composed for the Canon of the Mass, for the Ritual, and so forth.

Secondarily, he objected to the signing of any devotional objects, where a signature would seem as out of place as it would at the end of prayers in a private prayer book or on the lip of a chalice. Pride of creation sits ill with humility of devotion.

The Church is the sole guardian of Christian doctrine. The Catholic Church does not teach untruths, but individual Catholics unfortunately may. Whenever, therefore, a Catholic makes a statement involving doctrine, he should sign it. He is responsible for his interpretation of Doctrine. If he has made any mis-statement he should not remain hidden by anonymity. It must be clear that if there has been an error it is not the infallible Church that has erred, but a fallible member of that Church. Thus St. Augustine, St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure and all the great Christian writers, as well as the little ones, accept responsibility for their writings. As G. K. Chester-



ton once said, it is largely anonymity that makes modern journalism vicious. Moreover, the signing of writings often gives more information about the writing itself. As an example, the signature of the grade-school pupil on a political essay, could hardly carry the same authority as the signature of a prime minister.

Sacred art is didactic. Its purpose, as St. Bonaventure tells us, "is to express, instruct, and persuade." When the artist is commissioned to make an icon his work should conform to this dictum. The artist's job is to clothe the Sacred Doctrine in its graphic or plastic shape without altering the substance of the Doctrine entrusted to his creative effort. He is at liberty to interpret the external shape in the reasonable idiom of his own age or of his own personality. Thus the artist in lettering the inscription "INRI" for a Crucifixion may use Roman, Versal, Sansserif, Lombardic, Beneventan or other style of letter. But he may not place the inscription below the feet of the Crucified, or on the right or left member of the cross-beam because the Gospel states that the inscription was *above* Christ's head.

The Church states the doctrine. The artist gives it its accidental image. But who this artist is, or by whose hands the material is shaped are questions of singularly little importance\*, compared to the question of the doctrine being expressed. What is the meaning of the work; what its message; is it "instructive and persuasive"; what is its purpose; its final cause; does it lead to contemplation? These are important. The accidents of expression are not. "About what," asks Plato, "is the Sophist so eloquent?" Our own age has difficulty

understanding the didactic purpose of art. Most think that art is a vehicle for exhibiting the artist's precious individuality.

\*Mr. O. S. Lewis, in "The Personal Heresy," Oxford University Press, 1939, has defended the traditional position in the case of poetry, with clarity, force, and a beautiful example of Christian charity to his opponent.

External form indeed is the basic concern of the artist but in traditional societies it has always been considered bad manners to be egotistical about that form. And so it comes about that while we know the names of the medieval doctors, because they assumed responsibility for their writings when dealing with doctrine, we do not know the names of the medieval architects, sculptors and window-makers.

Eric Gill, following tradition, did well to sign his books; but if he ever carved his name on a holy statue, then he did ill.

The C.A.Q. has tried to follow the principles and practices of the ages of Faith in this regard. Father Catich and Mr. Carey signed the words they wrote on the position of the Catholic altar, but the calligrapher who made the accompanying adornments remains as anonymous as the architect of Our Lady of Chartres.

\* \* \*

3.

Q. Can you tell me if there is some regulation of the Church regarding the necessity of the *imprimatur* for holy pictures?

A. Canon Law No. 1385(3) lays it down that "Holy images, in whatever way they are printed, and whether with or without prayers," must pass ecclesiastical judgment. This of course includes devotional medals.

4.

Q. On p. 20 of the Easter issue it is stated that a translation of Maritain's *Art et Scholastique* was published by Sheed and Ward in 1930. My book seller tells me that no such volume was published.

A. The statement you quote is in error. The translation was published by Scribner's. We are very sorry to have caused trouble by this inaccuracy.

\* \* \*

5.

Q. (From a designer who had been asked to cut a pair of dies for the Miraculous Medal.) "I can't imagine that I shall be able to do such a thing as the Miraculous Medal, because Catholics would not accept any noticeable departure from what they are used to and from what they believe to be a design revealed by Heaven. I find it impossible to think that Our Lady was ignorant of the requirements of die-sinking—that she did not know that medals should be round, and so on. May one say that St. Catherine Laboure was inspired with a general idea which her subconsciousness interpreted in terms of the bad art with which she was familiar? There are difficulties about any theory I can form. The upshot of the vision is that a very bad standardized industrial product is multiplied as the sands of the sea, with the blessing of Holy Church and miraculous manifestations of Heaven's approval. What is your answer to those who say that the story refutes all our ideas about how things should be made? It is interesting to note that the Sacred Heart badge that St. Margaret Mary described as revealed to her in exact detail is forbidden by the Holy See as tending to heresy."

A. We feel that this question is as important as it is difficult. We are not qualified to deal with it authoritatively, and would welcome suggestions from our readers as to how a solution should be sought. It can obviously be answered only by one who is aware of the artistic as well as the doctrinal complexities involved.

\* \* \*

6.

Q. At the Baltimore meeting it was stated that writing and painting are in essence the same, and that we should follow the Chinese usage and



speak of "writing a picture." Will you please comment on this?

A. By "writing" we mean the making of characters which stand for ideas, or sounds. By "painting" we will mean here the making of images representing the shapes of visible objects.

Historically writing and painting are the same. The earliest written characters — as the Egyptian hieroglyphs — were representations of things, symbolizing sacred ideas. These paintings were also letters in the sense of our definitions. Originally, and for many centuries, there can have been little if any distinction between let-

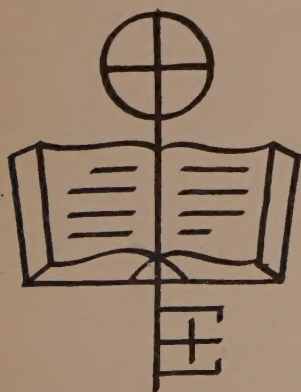


ters and paintings in the minds of the scribes who made both. To draw was to write, and to write was to draw. Thus the words telegraph, phonograph, lithograph, photograph, etc., all derive their meanings from the Greek root "to write."

Technically writing and painting are the same. They have the same material and instrumental causes. Both letters and representations are made with pen and ink upon paper, or with paint and brush upon panels, or with mallet and chisel upon stone.

And the purpose is the same in both. Both the letters and the figures are designed for the illumination of minds, and to persuade the illuminated to actions that they would otherwise not perform. Effective illumination is the end of both. Both are read.

But today the identity of final cause in painting and writing is not generally recognized. We all know that letters have a communicative purpose, an intelligible content, that they exist to be *read*; but we do not all believe the same of painting. Today, the majority of people who interest themselves in painting believe that its basic purpose is to give delight, that a painting is not a message to be read, but an aesthetic surface to be enjoyed.



It is because painting has thus de-generated, while the use of letters has not, that we deem it salutary to use the verb "to write" whenever feasible, in reference to all the graphic arts. Such a practice emphasizes the basic unity of the arts of visual communication, and their common sacred ancestry.

\* \* \*

7.

Q. I would like to work at Christian art, but I do not think that I could make money at it. I have to support myself and others, and therefore the question of money has to be considered. What would you suggest?

A. The desire for money cannot be the driving force behind the Christian artist. On the other hand a vocation should keep a man and his family in frugal comfort. If, understanding the nature of their dilemma, that artist is not able to support himself, he should analyze the situation and find out what is wrong.

Perhaps the vocation he has chosen cannot of its own nature be expected to supply a livelihood in his locality. Let us say that he writes religious lyrics, but that people are not interested enough in religious lyrics to keep him in comfort while he is producing them.

Or perhaps the job is well chosen, but he has no true vocation for it. We'll say he makes chalices (and there is certainly a need for simple, inexpensive, well-designed chalices), but he has no real knack for smith-work.

Or he may be doing work that is wanted, and doing it well, but pricing it badly; particularly he may be pricing it too high. He thus restricts his market and kills his own business.

Maybe his work is needed, and he has a vocation for that work, and follows the accepted prices, but has never put enough time into learning his craft to be really competent. Or perhaps he has the skill, but is lazy and unwilling to put in the effort success requires.

Or perhaps his ideas of frugal comfort are distorted. To spend too much is much the same in the end as to earn too little. It was Mr. Astor who said that a man does not have to be rich to be happy. The man with a million, so Mr. Astor said, can get just as much pleasure out of life as a man who is really rich.

We recommend an analysis of somewhat this kind, as a preparation for dealing with any practical vocation.

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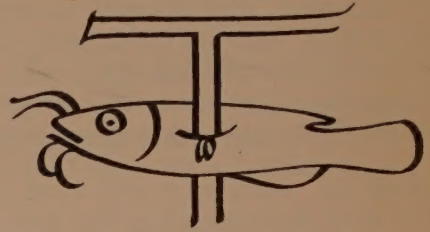
8.

Q. Father Kerrigan asks where in tradition we can find Christ spoken of as a carpenter. Isn't that wrong?

A. It is wrong. Some of the Fathers speak of Christ as a carpenter. None of the Evangelists does so, although most manuscripts of the Gospel of St. Mark report the disbelieving people of Christ's own country-

side as referring to Him as the carpenter. Origen denied that any of the manuscripts in his day (third century) did so, but he may have been mistaken.

The Church, however, will probably continue to propose to us Christ the King rather than Christ the Carpenter.



occisus est  
ab origine  
MUNDI

9.

Q. Is Christ to be depicted as a poor man?

A. Christ's poverty consisted not in lack of food, drink, clothing and amenities (supplied by rich friends), but in lack of wealth to buy these. The question is admirably treated in the forthcoming *For All to Live By*, (Bruce), by Rev. Leo C. Sterck.







